



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

DECISION RECORD East Fork Reservoir Fish Removal

Water Name: East Fork Reservoir **Water Code:** 16-4950
County: Fergus County **Legal Description:** T14N R19E S14
Lat/Long: 46.98304°, -109.28023°

Proposed Action: Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposes to remove northern pike, blue gill and, if time permits, yellow perch from East Fork Reservoir starting in spring 2012, prior to the late summer draw down proposed by the City of Lewistown. East Fork Reservoir is proposed to be drained to allow repair of the damaged gate stem on the upstream face of East Fork Dam. Removals may also occur during and immediately after the East Fork drawdown. The objective of the fish removal is to reduce the magnitude of fish in the reservoir that may wash downstream into East Fork Spring Creek and Big Spring Creek. It is anticipated that 100 – 200 northern pike and less than 100 bluegill will be removed, but under ideal sampling conditions the number of northern pike could be much higher.

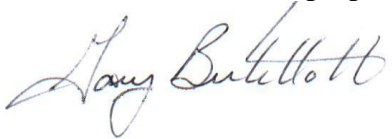
Description of Public Notification/Review Process: The Environmental Assessment (EA) was placed on the FWP web site on February 17, 2012. The comment period ended March 20, 2012. A press release about the proposed plan was distributed and printed in the Lewistown News Argus on March 3, 2012. The Big Spring Creek watershed group was contacted.

Summary of Public Comments: Three email comments and one verbal comment were received during the comment period. One written and one verbal comment were in complete support of the proposal. One written comment opposed the proposal as a waste of fisheries personnel time with no positive effect on the downstream fishery and stated the project was an “appeasement to the Trout Unlimited special interest group.” That comment also requested a fisheries management plan for the reservoir prior to the draw down. A third written comment requested composting of fish carcasses.

Response to Public Comment: Big Spring Creek is the premier trout fishery in the Lewistown vicinity. Northern pike impacts on this fishery have not been documented, but there are several studies that document northern pike influence on fish populations. It is possible northern pike could hurt the fishery, if the majority of the East Fork northern pike are washed downstream. FWP thinks it is reasonable to reduce these potential impacts if practical. The proposed action will likely involve a total of 1 -2 weeks of work for two MFWP employees. East Fork Reservoir is typically trapped each spring for at least one week so there would be very little additional work load involved with the removal of northern pike and blue gill. Yellow perch removal would require additional effort if high numbers were captured; we anticipate yellow perch flushing downstream would not harm the fisheries. Carcass disposal by composting, as

one commenter requested, would also require additional manpower and remove nutrients from the system. FWP typically disposes of 100–200 fish carcasses in East Fork in early fall each year when gill netting. There have not been any complaints regarding odor or floating carcasses during years of this work. Therefore, it is likely up to 200 fish carcasses daily could be sunk in the reservoir over a 2 week period with little impact on aesthetics. It is highly unlikely more than 100 fish daily or a cumulative total exceeding 400 northern pike and blue gill would be removed. FWP will likely stock East Fork with rainbow trout and/or brown trout immediately after the draw down. Please refer to the draw down decision record dated December 2, 2011 for additional options that may be considered after draw down. Long term management will be based on species that are remaining in the reservoir post draw down and will be evaluated at that time. Management strategies for East Fork Reservoir will be identified in the FWP's statewide Fisheries Management Plan, which will be undertaken and completed later this year.

Recommendation: Based on the EA, public comment, and benefits and risks associated with this project, it is my decision that there would be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore an environmental impact statement is not required. It is my decision to proceed with the proposed action to remove northern pike and bluegill but not yellow perch from East Fork Reservoir. Active removal of yellow perch will not be undertaken due to time constraints and fish waste concerns. The draft EA and this decision notice will serve as the final documents for this proposal.



Gary Bertellotti
Regional Supervisor

0328/2012

Date